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President Defends CIA, Covert Operations Abroad

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President Carter yesterday firmly defended the need for some covert intelligence operations abroad and said he finds no evidence that any "ongoing CIA operation" is "illegal or improper."

The President's support of secret intelligence activity "to guarantee the security of our country" was as strong as any of his predecessors. He put his emphasis on reducing the number of people who have access to secret information on such activity.

In a critical tone about press disclosures, Carter declined comment on recent reports that Jordan's King Hussein received millions of dollars in secret annual payments from the Central Intelligence Agency and that nearly a score of other foreign leaders were on the CIA payroll in past years.

Carter said his review of "the more controversial revelations" showed some to be "quite erroneous, some with some degree of accuracy." However, he said, "I have not found anything illegal or improper," acknowledging that this is "a value judgment."

On other foreign policy issues, the President said at his second televised news conference:

•Uganda's treatment of human rights has "disgusted the entire civilized world." Referring to the recent killings of Uganda Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum and two cabinet ministers of President Idi Amin, Carter condemned "the horrible murders that apparently are taking place in that country..."

•"I never had an inclination to single out the Soviet Union as the only place where human rights are being abridged." Besides Uganda, Carter said he also has expressed concern "about imprisoned political prisoners in South Korea, in Cuba," in South America and elsewhere.

•Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance's recent trip to the Middle East was "very successful" in probing the negotiating positions of the Arab and Israeli governments for a peace settlement. Carter noted that starting with a visit from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on March 7, he will meet at the White House, in turn, with leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

•Repair of U.S.-Cuba relations awaits further discussion and also evidence of willingness "to restore basic human rights in Cuba" involving po-

litical prisoners, and Cuba's "attitude toward overseas adventures," notably Angola. Carter said, "I am willing, though, to discuss these matters with the Cuban leaders."

•"There is a great deal of concern in this country about the future of Canada," over the danger of secession by Quebec Province, but that is a decision for Canadians. His two days of talks with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau reinforced the need for continuing close links between the two nations, Carter added.

When the CIA payments to King Hussein over a 20-year period were first reported by The Washington Post on Feb. 18, the account said that the payoffs were reported to President Ford by the Intelligence Oversight Board last year as an impropriety. President Carter, the account said, learned of the payments only very recently and ordered them stopped.

During his presidential campaign, Carter said, "If the CIA ever makes a mistake," he would call a press conference, as the President, and announce it.

The President said yesterday that "I have adopted a policy, which I am not going to leave, of not commenting directly on any specific CIA activity," but he said he had ordered a complete analysis which will be completed next week.

However, he repeated that if he finds "an impropriety or illegality" he will not only correct it, "but also will let the American people know about it."

"This is a very serious problem," nevertheless, Carter said, "of how in a democracy to have adequate intelligence gathered, assessed and used to guarantee the security of our country."

Carter expressed confidence that the incoming CIA director, Adm. Stansfield Turner, will seek to assure that operations are "not only proper and legal, but also compatible with the attitudes of the American people."

Carter said he is working with congressional leaders to reduce the number of persons with access to intelligence information. He said he has talked with Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, and "I think he would also confirm that the impropriety or the illegality does not exist on any ongoing CIA operation."

According to an administration source, the previous report that the Intelligence Oversight Board found "impropriety" in the King Hussein transactions, referred to how the matter had been reported to Congress, rather than the payments themselves.

Inouye, after a meeting of his committee yesterday, said he was personally satisfied that the committee is fully informed of all "ongoing covert operations."

When reminded that the payments to Hussein were reported to have been stopped, Inouye said, "I have no comment at all about the Hussein matter."

The President, in his discussion of human rights yesterday, endorsed Britain's idea to ask the U.N. Human Rights Commission "to go into Uganda" to assess "the persecution of those who have aroused the ire of Mr. [President Idi] Amin."

Carter also noted that the United States is engaged in meetings with British representatives at the State Department "to try to get a renewed proposal" on achieving majority rights in minority white-ruled Rhodesia.

At the State Department, discussions on Rhodesia, which have been under way since Monday with a British delegation headed by Sir Anthony Duff, were joined yesterday by South African Ambassador and Foreign Minister-designate R.F. Botha. The American delegation is headed by William E. Schaefele Jr., assistant secretary for African affairs.

Carter said that in addition to the Rhodesian issue, in which Britain is taking the lead, "we will still have left Namibia (Southwest Africa) and ultimately, the majority rule question in South Africa."